

Understanding the Old Testament 8 Divided Kingdom 930BC to 586BC

After the death of Solomon, the people of the Northern Tribes asked for a decrease in taxes. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, listened to his father's counselors who told him to hear the cries of the people. Then he went to his friends who told to be firm and answer with power. He sided with those who said what he wanted to hear. As a result, the nation split in two.

This period includes 2 Chronicles 10f; 1Kings 12 – 2 Kings; and many of the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah; Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk; Zephaniah. The rest of the prophets, both major and minor all fall into the short period of the captivity and restoration.

The Northern ten tribes made Shechem their capital. They immediately turned to idolatry. It was almost a necessity, for the Temple was in the south. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin continued the Temple worship. The ruler of the North, Jeroboam, set up altars in the north and south of his kingdom and appointed priests to serve the people. They adopted the gods of their neighbors. Those Northern tribes were often referred to as Israel or Ephraim. The Southern tribes were often just called Judah.

The Northern tribes never had a godly king. Sometimes it would fight with Judah over territory, and other times it would ally itself with them for support. It was eventually conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. It only existed as an independent nation as long as America has to date.

Some of the prophets prophesied to both kingdoms, while others were assigned to only one, or in some cases, a foreign power. Jonah and Obadiah are examples of being sent to foreign nations.

The Southern tribes had some godly kings interspersing long periods of bad kings. The bad kings would turn the people to idolatry. The nation would suffer because of it, and the good kings would come along and turn the people back to worship of the true God alone. A few of the better kings were Asa, Hezekiah, and Jotham. One thing that will strike you as you read the stories of these kings is how the ones who turn from God are remembered as evil and often bring calamity upon the people they are ruling over. The good kings stand out as shining lights that saved their country from an early demise and turned the hearts of the people back to God. Is it any different in our world today? When they trusted God and sought Him with their whole heart, He answered them with blessings and victory. When they turned from Him or forgot Him, He allowed troubles and enemies to remind them. Have you seen that in your own life?

None of the kings were as great as David, though Hezekiah came close. None of them had a prophetic gift like David. Because of the promise to David that his son would reign forever, the people of Judah began to hope that one of the kings would be the promised Messiah. That hope continued through to Jesus' day. Remember, this is the lineage that would fulfill Genesis 3:15.

Some of the clearest predictions of the Messiah come from the pen of Isaiah. He wrote a number of suffering servant songs. The most familiar is Isaiah 53, the chapter that converted the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts.

During this period, the prophets began to fill in the details of the coming Messiah. Most of them prophesied the destruction of their nation if they would not turn back to God. Jeremiah was there right at the end of the nation of Judah pleading with the people to repent and surrender to the Babylonians who conquered them. Jeremiah predicted the coming of the New Covenant and how God would change the heart of man. There were two conquests that left puppet kings on the throne. Daniel was taken during one of these conquests. The third conquest was complete and final. Only the weak, infirmed, and those in poverty were left in the land. As the rest of the nation went into captivity, they wept at the destruction of their nation and temple. They wondered how they would be redeemed without the sacrificial system.

Some of the names of God revealed in the prophetic writings of this period are Jehovah Tsidkenu – The Lord Our Righteousness – see Jeremiah 23:5-6 God through Jeremiah was causing them to look forward to the true source of righteousness.

Also from Jeremiah, Jehovah Gmolah – The Lord Recompenses or repays. See Jeremiah 51:56. If you do evil, He repays you with judgment. If you do good, He repays you with blessing. He sets the books straight.

Last week we skipped the revelation of David in Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd – Jehovah Rohi Could we ask for a better shepherd? What does a shepherd do? How does that apply to your life?

What kind of warnings does the period of the divided kingdom have for us? What does it say about the nature of man? How is it similar to the period of the Judges?

It was 20 years after this period ended that Gautama Buddha was born. Another 15 and Confucius would be born. They were born while the nation of Judah was in captivity. Does that tell us anything?